

## MRS. HAROLD STAGG.

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### CHAPTER II.

Harold, who was fond of quaint characters, found himself smiling. "Did you know my brother-in-law?" he asked, by way of drawing out his interlocutor.

"Oh, yes; every one knew the professor," was the answer, with a judicial deliberation. "He was a fine man, the professor was; a trifling flighty in his notions according to my lights, and not always knowing as to which side his bread was buttered; but a real Christian gentleman, and taking points from no one in his business, too, though he did pluck out a good many dollars in them patents of his, that never showed him no profit, and that would ha' come in handy now, I reckon, for them that's left. That's the fine gift of his; she favors her father, too. Going to stop long?"

The driver as he asked this question drew up before a medium-sized house of old-fashioned pattern, gabled and of weather-beaten shingle color, with a vegetable garden on one side.

"Only a few hours probably. Is this the place?"

"That's where he lived, sir, ever since he came here," said the man, muffling his speech again, by way of respect to the departed.

Harold Stagg passed through the little gate, and strode with a business-like step to the door, on which he sounded vigorously with the knocker that took the place of a bell. After a moment it was opened by a small boy who looked at him doubtfully, as though he suspected who the visitor might be, but did not dare to make the first advances.

"Take it you must be Harold Stagg Baldwin," said the owner of the first two-thirds of the name.

"Yes, sir," added the lad, with a glad, sheepish smile.

"Well, I'm your uncle Harold," he said, putting him on the head. "I suppose your sister got my telegram?"

"Yes, sir. She's expecting you."

Whereupon his namesake seized the hands of the valise, by way of evincing hospitality and hiding embarrassment at the same time, and began pulling it into the entry.

As Harold Stagg followed him, a taller boy and a tall, slim young woman advanced from the threshold of an adjoining room.

"Ah, my dearest!" he said, grasping Silas by the hand and embracing his niece. "I'm glad to be with you."

"Will you walk in, uncle?" said Eleanor, ushering him into the room from which she had come.

It was a cosy little apartment; its furniture and stuffs, though slightly worn and slightly old-fashioned, were tasteful. "I suppose you are ready for breakfast," she added. "It will be ready in a moment."

"Yes; I am a little hungry."

Harold spoke cheerfully. An atmosphere of grief was instinctively oppressive to him. Moreover, he felt that, he ought to try to enliven the sun-singed family. Poor little girl! How pale and sad she looked, with dark places under her eyes, that told of heartache and loss of sleep! She was pretty, to distinctly pretty, with a delicate, pensive style of face that matched well her willowy figure, but she appeared far from strong. He wondered what Emma would think of her. There was not a trace of embarrassment in her manner, as she did the hospitalities of the breakfast-room, offering him his choice of tea or coffee, and providing for his other needs with a serious composure that was astonishing to him, from its lack of consciousness, and yet was in no respect girlish. He could scarcely believe, until he convinced himself by inquiry, that she was but eighteen.

Early contact with the responsibilities of life had developed her in certain ways beyond her years, and yet left her a child in many respects. How would she and Emma get on? What would Emma think of her?

"I have come out here, you know, to take you all back with me to New York," said Harold, presently, getting to the point at once, as was his wont. "It is your aunt's wish and mine," he added, breaking the silence that followed his announcement.

The two boys looked at their sister a doubtful, bewildered sort of way. She was evidently thinking.

"That would be very pleasant, uncle, and it is very kind of you to suggest it; but as we have to support ourselves, wouldn't it be wiser for us to begin here at once where we are known?" she said, in her calm, dispassionate tone. "You see, papa left very little property—nothing, except his patents and this house, which is mortgaged for half what it is worth; so that we have no money to live on. Papa talked it all over with me as well as he could, the day before he died. He said he had been meaning to insure his life during the last year, but he hadn't the ready money to pay the premiums. I told him that he mustn't mind having spent his savings in developing his inventions; he had believed in them, and it was his duty for our sakes as well as his own, to try to make them successful. We should be sure to get somehow, and probably some day the patents would prove very valuable."

It was plain that she wished others to believe, as she did implicitly, that her father had acted for the best in everything. Doubtless, some one had already made disparaging comments as to the cause of their poverty.

"I don't think you understand me,

"I'm so glad you've come! I heard one of the children crying, and I'd gone up just for a moment, thinking I should be sure to hear if you came in."

"Yes, certainly, here we are safe and sound. Eleanor, Silas, Hal, this is our aunt Emma."

"How d'y do, my dears? I'm very glad to see you," said Mrs. Stagg, kissing Eleanor on the cheek, and smiling kindly on the boys, who between the butler, the electric lights, the spacious hall and this new splendid relative stood confounded. "You must be tired out, and we'll go right in to supper."

"What do you suppose, Emma, I caught this young woman doing just now? Beautifying herself in the glass? It's New York air. I wager that within a week she'll have been inside of every dressmaker's and milliner's shop in the city." Whereupon Harold Stagg laughed gleefully.

"I imagine you have discovered by this time that your uncle's a dead loss," said Emma, who was leading the way, having already, in a single glance, the capability of which poor Eleanor realized, comprehended the primitiveness of her niece's ideas on clothes. She reflected that had Harold been a malicious man he could not have thought of anything more ridiculous than to call attention to the poor child's toilet, to say nothing of the fact that Eleanor was, and must remain for the present, in deep black. Such lack of perception on the part of her better-half prompted her to turn and link her arm sympathetically 'round the young girl's, while Harold, to whom it had suddenly occurred that his allusion to millinery was the reverse of well-timed, followed behind, endeavoring to conceal his self-conceit by vigorously rubbing the smoky heads of his two nephews, and trolleying a bluff glee the burden of which was that his heart was true to Poll.

An hour later, the Baldwins were comfortably ensconced in the blue sun, and Emma was hearing from the lips of her husband an account of the journey. Although he had mapped out in her mind a probable programme, she had waited to see the children, before giving her imagination full swing; but now that they appeared to be very much what she had hoped, all sorts of thoughts were churning in her brain regarding their adaptation to her household and the proper exertions to be made in their behalf. The boys were of just the right age for Mr. Sampson, as she had expected, and in the autumn, after a summer by the sea-side, they could be packed off with brand-new outfits, and she save from further responsibility, except in vacation time, for several years to come. As to Eleanor, she was markedly disappointed. To be sure, Harold had written that she was a quiet, unobjectionable sort of girl, but she had not been able to dismiss from her mind a haunting idea of a showy, slangy young person with gaudy manners, and mourning bedecked with jet, until the real niece stood before her. Emma congratulated herself that she would have very plenty eating: Eleanor was drowsy, unspiritualized, and retiring, but a single season in society would work the necessary changes. She was rather pretty now, and she would be very fetching, indeed, when she learned to hold herself properly and to dress her hair with some regard to what was becoming. How preferable to have to deal with an unobjectionable child who had no preconceived ideas, than with a humpbacked coquette whose bad manners were already formed.

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indeed, he reflected, was a little knowledge of the way of the world and a few suggestions as to her attire, in order to make him a proud uncle; for while so many of the young women in society were mere butterflies or dolls, did not she possess, in addition to a pretty face, the charms of intellectual culture? Emma would understand exactly how to transform this inconspicuous cygnet into a dazzling swan.

Eleanor sat pensive and wan, unresponsive, and lacking appetite, thereby puzzling her uncle, who could better have understood torrents of tears than this dry-eyed, mopish manner of grief. He found that she likes to talk about her father, whose companion and confidante she seemed to have been, and toward the end of the journey they branched off, on one occasion, on books, each surprising the other by discovering that their tastes in poetry were not dissimilar. Harold did not pretend to read everything that was going, but he knew the names of the prominent publications, and it was evident that Eleanor was familiar with most of them. All the same, he reflected, was a little knowledge of the way of the world and a few suggestions as to her attire, in order to make him a proud uncle; for while so many of the young women in society were mere butterflies or dolls, did not she possess, in addition to a pretty face, the charms of intellectual culture? Emma would understand exactly how to transform this inconspicuous cygnet into a dazzling swan.

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